



IN THE GARDEN

The 2022 Master Gardener Conference | Tupelo

The 23rd annual Mississippi Master Gardener State Conference was held in Tupelo, the birthplace of Elvis, the King of Rock and Roll, May 3-5. It is debatable as to whether this gathering of dedicated gardeners actually did rock and roll in the gardens of Tupelo. Still, this state conference held at the BancorpSouth Conference Center was educational and informative and a truly festive occasion. Mississippi Master Gardeners are volunteers who support the Mississippi State University Extension Service. It was a meeting of like-minded souls who have a passion for gardening and an insatiable quest for knowledge. Renowned horticulturists and authors, as well as local garden experts were featured speakers. There were floral demonstrations, garden parties, and garden tours of local gardens. The opening evening gala was held in Doyce Deas' lovely, lush garden setting, and even Elvis made an appearance at the closing evening gala, which perhaps left a few gardeners "all shook up!"

writer MARGARET GRATZ

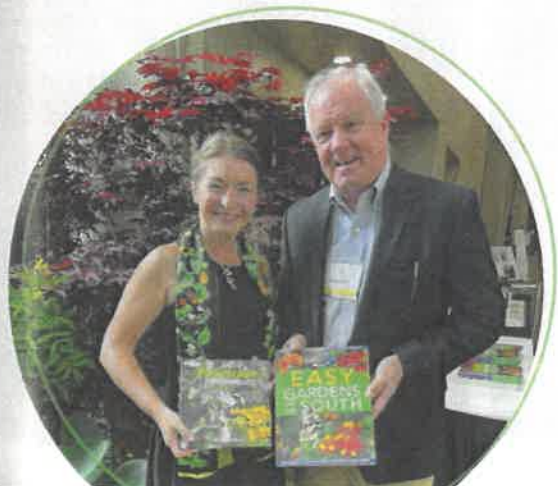


EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS

Gardeners are always inquisitive—there is always something new to learn about this botanical hobby. The keynote speakers were exceptional and entertaining. Rick Griffin, an innovative Mississippi landscape architect, shared his wisdom, expertise, and love for the natural world of our Mississippi home place. Harvey Cotton, garden writer, designer, consultant, and former chief horticulturist for the Huntsville Botanical Garden, spoke on using native plants in the landscape. Brie Arthur, a celebrated speaker and bestselling author, charmed the audience with her humor and her enthusiasm for foodscaping in a suburban garden or how to incorporate vegetables into the home landscape.

There were also breakout sessions led by local garden experts. In these sessions, the Master Gardeners could enhance their knowledge about perennials, plant propagation, floral design, pesky critter control, and how to avoid landscape or gardening blunders. There were programs on organic gardening, trees, fruits and nuts, native plants, and gardening with moss. For the bird watchers and photographers in the crowd, there was a program on bald eagles. Many of the speakers were nationally known writers and speakers. And wonderful vendors were selling a vast array of garden-related items.

Lee County and the city of Tupelo rolled out the red carpet for visitors from throughout Mississippi. Many local businesses and individuals provided exceptional raffle items and helped sponsor the event.



GARDEN TOURS

The garden tours of local gardens in the area were extremely popular. Lee County Master Gardeners opened their private gardens for tours. Each garden was exceptionally beautiful, and each garden was different, reflecting the personality of the gardener and their special interests. In their gardens, roses, irises, and clematis were in abundance. There were water features and trellises festooned with flowering vines, and containers were overflowing with lush annuals. Some of the gardens were formal, while others were more eclectic. One was a wildflower garden. These were all garden retreats that enticed one to sit a spell.

Of course, gardeners also enjoy the camaraderie and fellowship of those who have a passion for all things horticultural, and it was with gracious hospitality that the Lee County Master Gardeners opened their gardens.





PUBLIC GARDENS

The public gardens were also on tour and were of special interest. Throughout the seasons, the gardens at First Presbyterian Church in Tupelo are ablaze with flowering shrubs, perennials, and annuals. It is the setting for the Columbarium, but this garden of welcome serves as a frequent setting for church services, picnics, and receptions. Visitors from all walks of life and of every faith have found repose and joy in this church garden.

The Magnolia Botanical Gardens at the Verona Extension Center were also open for tours. In this demonstration garden were vegetables, roses, many ornamental plants, and Mississippi Medalion Plants. This garden, part of the North Mississippi Research and Extension Center, is a wonderful educational resource and demonstration garden for professionals, consumers, and garden enthusiasts.

Spring Street Garden is a neighborhood garden maintained by the Lee County Master Gardeners. This garden is the setting for the annual Celebration of Gardens, where Master Gardeners give gardening tips, and the place for the annual monarch butterfly release that enralls both children and adults.



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THE
MAGNOLIA
BOTANICAL
GARDENS



The 2022 Master Gardener State Conference had been in the making for over two years. Under the capable leadership of Lee County Master Gardeners, Cheryl Storey and Jenny Smothers, a host of enthusiastic Lee County Master Gardeners, along with Dr. Jeff Wilson, State Master Gardener Coordinator, and Susan McGukin, Lee County Master Gardener Coordinator, the conference was a resounding success.

The Master Gardener Program is a project of Mississippi State University. In exchange for horticultural educational opportunities, individuals pledge to give volunteer hours that benefit local communities. This is a wonderful program that is educational, helps to keep Mississippi beautiful, and is an affirmation of our gardening heritage. And, yes, it is permissible to rock 'n' roll in the garden, just like Elvis! M



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